

Bill Fromhold

State Representative

49th District

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CAPITAL LETTER:

Legislative Session Report

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Committees:

Appropriations, *Vice Chair*

Higher Education

Select Committee on Pension Policy, *Vice Chair*

Washington Learns, Steering Committee

Dear Fellow Citizen:

The 2006 legislative session produced historic agreements and important results for Washington families this year. We approved a fiscally responsible budget that saves more than \$900 million and invests in education, health care, and pensions. We also lowered business taxes to promote economic development and job growth.

Southwest Washington communities will benefit from achievements that:

- Strengthen education to help thousands of students in the Evergreen and Vancouver school districts pass the WASL;
- Protect our communities from sex offenders and keep motorists with multiple DUI convictions off the road;
- Help seniors by repealing the nursing home bed tax;
- Allow everyone to enjoy visits to Paradise Point or Battle Ground Lake state parks without the daily parking fees; and
- Take a step in the right direction on contentious issues such as Columbia River water use, medical malpractice, and unemployment insurance.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. Ann Tjersland, my senior legislative assistant, and I hope to hear your comments on what we accomplished in the Legislature this year.

Respectfully,

Bill Fromhold
State Representative
49th Legislative District

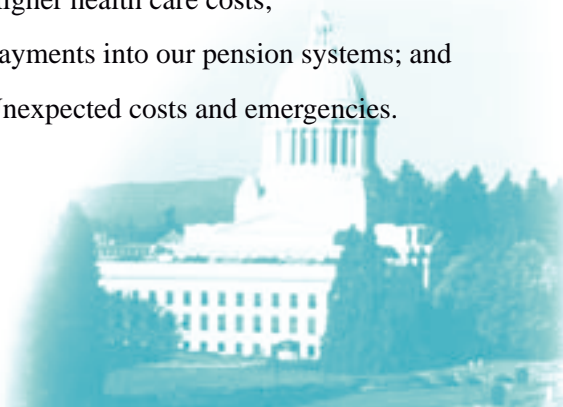
Supplemental Budget

Our state's economic recovery and strong housing market produced a nearly \$1.6 billion budget surplus – the first one in four years.

As vice chair of the Appropriations Committee, I am pleased to report we approved a fiscally responsible supplemental budget that addresses critical challenges while saving a substantial portion of the surplus for the future.

The supplemental budget sets aside more than \$900 million for the next biennium in savings accounts and reserves that can be used for:

- ◆ Class size reductions and other education needs;
- ◆ Higher health care costs;
- ◆ Payments into our pension systems; and
- ◆ Unexpected costs and emergencies.



APRIL 2006

Representative Bill Fromhold

Investing in education

We dedicated much of the additional spending in the supplemental budget to education and health care. We paid for thousands of new students enrolled in our public schools since we approved the two-year state budget in 2005 and we provided a small cost of living adjustment for



K-12 employees to keep up with inflation. About \$28 million urgently provides after-school tutoring and summer school programs to help students meet our graduation requirements.

The Legislature also made smart investments in health care that will reduce costly visits to the emergency room that everyone ultimately pays for. We added 6,500 low-income adults to the Basic Health Plan and 5,500 children to the Children's Health Plan to reduce the burden on community health clinics such as SeaMar in Vancouver. We also eliminated the Medicaid Part D co-payments for the low-income and disabled.

Economic development

The Legislature approved more than \$50 million in tax incentives to promote economic development and create jobs in our state. Our region's semiconductor industry will benefit from a business and occupation tax break if they invest at least \$350 million for new manufacturing facilities in the state. This could create additional high-paying jobs, such as the 600 currently employed at SEH America, to support families and our local economy.



Strengthening Education

This year we strengthened our education system to help our children succeed in today's highly competitive economy. We implemented several recommendations from the Washington Learns interim report, which calls for the creation of a cabinet-level early learning department and help for students to meet graduation standards.

A final report from this unprecedented review of our entire education system will be released at the end of the year. As a member of the steering committee for Washington Learns, I will strongly advocate the 2007 Legislature act on the recommendations to vastly improve our public schools for the 21st century.

A focus on early learning

Investments in early learning lead to high returns. Yet our state has not fully realized this potential for all of our young children. Less than half of the state's incoming kindergarteners are ready for school because they did not have access to early learning programs.



To affirm our state's commitment to children from birth to age 5, we created a new Department of Early Learning that will work with the K-12 school system to prepare children for their first day of kindergarten. The department will bring together nine child care and preschool programs, making it easier for parents to access the information they need. In addition, a new private-public partnership led by the Gates Foundation will work with the new department to pilot innovative early learning programs that will benefit our communities.

Help to meet graduation

High school sophomores in the Evergreen and Vancouver school districts will be among 84,000 students completing the math and science portions of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) this month. This is the first class required to pass the WASL in order to graduate in 2008.



We approved \$28 million in funding for school districts to provide after-school and Saturday classes to help students learn basic skills to succeed on the test. Students will also have access to summer school programs to prepare for the first of four retake opportunities in August. In addition, we approved alternative options to give students other ways to demonstrate they meet standards.

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Access to higher education

Washington has a shortage of graduates in high demand fields, causing many high-tech and cutting edge companies to seek candidates from other states and abroad. Last year, we added 7,900 new enrollments at our colleges and universities and authorized WSU Vancouver to begin admitting freshman and sophomores next fall.

This session, we focused on creating additional room for students at WSU Vancouver and Clark College to help meet the demand for nurses, engineers and scientists. Nearly 500 new seats will be available, including 200 at our community and technical colleges. We also launched the Opportunity Grants Program to give low-income students a chance to receive job training.

Safeguarding our Community

The Southwest Washington delegation, led by Rep. Jim Moeller and me in the House of Representatives, was successful in securing funds to complete the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab in Vancouver. This full-service crime lab will be dedicated to conducting DNA analysis for cases in

our region. This will help our court system conduct work more efficiently and save taxpayers the cost of sending analysis to other labs.

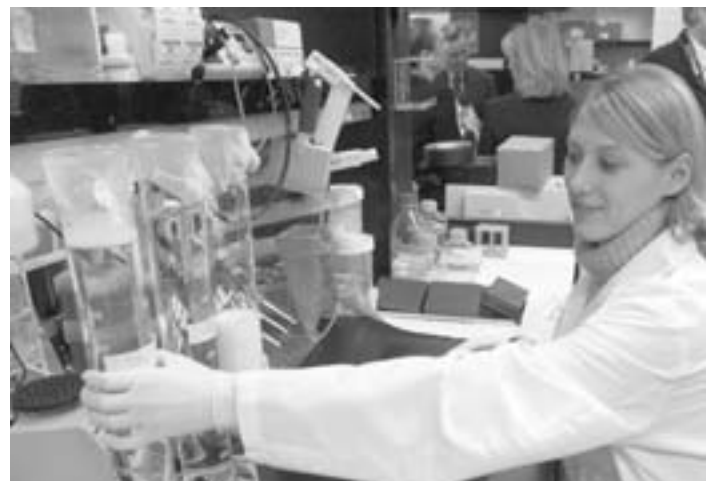
We also made some of the toughest laws in the nation against sex offenders stronger by passing legislation this year to keep our communities safe.

- ◆ A 25-year mandatory sentence for serious crimes against children or vulnerable adults.
- ◆ Increased penalties for failure to register as a sex offender, possession of illicit photos of children, and for communicating with a minor for immoral purposes over the Internet.
- ◆ Authorized the electronic monitoring of sex offenders following their release from prison when appropriate.



Green fuels

Our state's agricultural resources can help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. We invested in seed crushers so our farmers can grow crops that can be turned into biodiesel. We also approved progressive legislation that requires 2 percent of all gasoline sold be ethanol and 2 percent of diesel sold be biodiesel by 2008. This will help reinvest dollars we spend on oil back into our state's economy.



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Bipartisan breakthroughs

Our region's population boom will benefit from a breakthrough agreement on Columbia River water use. The governor signed a bill that ends decades of gridlock by creating a management system that serves the needs of farmers, commerce, and fish. New holding facilities will store water in the winter to help solve our water resource problems.

The governor and key members from both sides of the aisle were instrumental in achieving additional breakthroughs that include: an agreement on unemployment insurance that is supported by both business and labor; and a compromise on medical malpractice that will save lives by reducing medical errors, lower premiums for doctors, and reform our civil liability system.



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